

Faith and Brand Experience

Sheri Lyons

Sheri Lyons is a Certified Master Coach and a Ken Blanchard Companies Leadership Development Partner.

Reflecting on two decades of leading people and culture in organizations, I can see that the line between the customer and the employee is fading. The customer experience and the employee experience rise and fall together, directly influencing the vitality of our organizations. Today's woke employees and customers are highly selective of which organizations they will support.

From inside and outside of the organization come demands for radical transparency and inclusion, an active stance on social issues and a commitment to purpose and meaning. This requires a dynamic people model that flips the traditional hierarchy upside down to create an agile organization based on belonging and connection. A nimble network of people and teams on the inside reflects the diverse global world on the outside. Faith is part of that diversity, and by welcoming faith inside of corporate America we see, hear and engage the whole person, tapping into all of their divine brilliance and accessing the part of them that bridges the gaps that keep us from realizing our collective potential.

I have served in senior leadership roles in organizations ranging from Fortune 100 to high growth start-up and mid-cap turn around. I learned how to bring my whole self to work in one of those organizations. I showed up as an executive and a woman, a mother and a leader, a Catholic and a daughter. I brought my faith to work every day and it was honored and nurtured. This organization had a Chief Spiritual Officer at the top and by our sides. He led with praise and positivity, speaking to our souls and granting us permission to be. This created an environment where all felt welcome and connected by something much larger than the company that united us. We were on a mission to becoming our best selves while training millions of the world's best managers. We were developing leaders who know how to see and bring out the best in their people, create great places to work, and deliver real bottom-line results for their organizations.

While immersed in this experience at The Ken Blanchard Companies, I came to know the parts of me that had previously felt unwelcome at work. As I embraced wholeness, I realized the impact that leaving those parts of me at the door had on my performance and employee experience. In retrospect, I can see how much I withheld, how much potential went unrecognized and how many times that we collectively fell short of the finish line. I have no doubt that celebrating the whole person would have enhanced those work cultures, engaging all voices to produce a better result. Even so, I am grateful for the contrasting experiences on my journey because they shined the light on how to bring my faith to work.

When I bring my faith to work, I see the face of God in others. I accept others without judgement and seek out other perspectives. I acknowledge the brilliance and resourcefulness inside of everyone. I lead with trust and look for the goodness that exists in every situation. I accept imperfection. I acknowledge my mistakes, asking for forgiveness and forgiving others. I

act with honesty and integrity, seeking feedback, building trust and connection. I am not afraid. I believe in the power and potential of people and serve the greater good when I work to unleash their magnificence. When I bring my faith to work, I serve first and lead second. I focus on people and results. I am a servant leader, born from a wholeness that is reflected in my mindset and skillset.

A servant leadership mindset is all about focusing on others rather than yourself. It recognizes that there are two distinct parts to servant leadership: setting the vision for the company and turning that vision into action with humility. Setting the direction for the organization and defining the mission, vision and values establishes a shared purpose so that everyone understands where we are going and how we are going to get there. When we help others to make meaningful connections to the organization's purpose, the team on the front lines is empowered to passionately translate the company's brand and strategy to the customer. Engaging in conversations to find personal meaning in our work honors each life on the team and calls their gifts forward for the greater good. When the mission also serves our people, we all rise together. In alignment we co-create strategic initiatives with specific goals that also have meaning and purpose, engaging the entire team on a shared journey.

With clear strategic direction, we set out together to live according to the vision and implement the strategy. In the day-to-day management conversations and behaviors that people need to be successful, we are serving the people who serve our customers. When people have clear goals and get the direction and support the need, they thrive. We create strong relationships and results by being present and creating a space where people feel seen and heard. Building competence and commitment in an environment that supports belonging and growth unleashes potential, enabling people to work independently and take on more responsibility.

By meeting these basic human needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence a sense of safety is created and trust is built. In this safe space we act from love, not fear. We engage the heart, head and hands in service to the mission. This is the space where innovation is born – where great ideas are shared, where we go above and beyond for each other and where we delight our customers. This level of engagement throughout the organization creates customer devotion and employee work passion, which drive long term profitability and sustainability.

Weaving faith in all its forms into the tapestry of our organizations adds depth, strength, resilience and freedom to the fabric of the work community that is reflected in the brand experience, inside and outside of the organization. Imagine the strength of a brand built by people who are encouraged to bring their whole selves to work and supported in realizing their divine potential. Faith at work creates success from the inside out.